

CARVED IVORY



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Mr. and Mrs. J. Milnor Wadswley

With sincere regards of

Outbore Swasey

Cleveland Ohio

April 7th 1928



CARVED IVORY





THE LEGEND IN IVORY

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CARVED IVORY

*"Laborious, orient ivory,
sphere in sphere"*

(Tennyson)

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FOREWORD

This little book tells the story of two ivory tusks. It aims to relate the interesting incidents connected with the capture of a wild elephant in Burma, and to picture the native artist, as he set about his work of carving its tusks. If the scenes of the legend so exquisitely carved in the rich ivory can suggest to the reader the romantic beauty of the Orient, these few pages will have served their purpose.

For the time and thought expended in procuring the tusks, I am greatly indebted to my friend, Rev. C. A. Nichols, of Bassein, Burma. Grateful acknowledgment is also due to Miss L. B. Hughes, for the careful interest with which she followed the progress of the work at Moulmein, and to Miss Grace Pennington, former missionary to Burma, for her delightful interpretation of the legend depicted in the ivory.

AMBROSE SWASEY

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CAPTURING THE ELEPHANT AND CARVING HIS TUSKS

THE incident which opened the way for securing the tusks pictured in the frontispiece, occurred in 1916. While crossing the Pacific, I was fortunate enough to find my friend Dr. C. A. Nichols as one of my fellow passengers. He was returning to his work as missionary in Bassein, Burma. One day as I was talking with him about the beautiful carved ivory I had seen on my visit to Burma thirteen years before, he told me that many elephants were captured and tamed in Bassein, which had consequently become a trading center for ivory and ivory-carving. When I expressed a strong desire to obtain a fine pair of elephant's tusks, he assured me that if I would give him time enough, he could find an excellent pair.

Five years later Dr. Nichols wrote me that he had secured the tusks from a Burmese timber merchant named Ko Po Thet, who captured and trained wild elephants for handling the heavy timber, which for the greater part is teak. This particular elephant, exceptionally large,

he had caught about thirty miles west of Bassein, in the Yoma Range of foothills.

In the course of my correspondence with Dr. Nichols, I learned many facts regarding the capture of wild elephants. Furthermore, he kept me in close touch with the progress of our story, and secured for this little book the two photographs showing the native carver at work. The descriptions in the following paragraphs are mostly culled from Dr. Nichols's very interesting letters.

Capturing wild elephants is a dangerous undertaking in Burma, calling for courage as well as skill in performance. Only experienced natives can hope for the best of success. First they raise a stockade very much like a fish-weir; then they drive the animal into the enclosure, in which they have already placed a tame elephant to help overcome the wild one. The hungry wild captive is fed at once; in about a month he is usually tame enough to be ready for service. It seems almost incredible that such wild animals can be tamed in so short a time. When we stop to consider, however, that elephants are remarkably intelligent, we cease to wonder. The Karens insist that the elephant understands their language! They claim that a few weeks after his capture, he will follow his master about the village, fully obeying orders and showing no sign whatever of fear.

Ko Po Thet's captive was a fine specimen of his class. He was valued at eight thousand rupees, but he had one defect. On one of his massive shoulders were traces of a gunshot scar. As the wound was apparently healed, no further trouble was apprehended, but after he had





MAUNG KIN AND HIS HELPER AT WORK

been in service for a short time, the wound opened, and not long after, the noble animal died. Thus it came about that Ko Po Thet was willing to sell the tusks to Dr. Nichols. In the local market, they were the best of their kind, because they were regarded as "fat," a term denoting that they were mature and slightly yellow. When not mature, the ivory is whiter and liable to splinter in the carving. The tusks measured four and a half feet from tip to base—a fine bequest of a mighty elephant. The hollow portion of the base was partly cut off, the remaining few inches being retained for mounting. The powerful tusks, once so useful to the elephant in the forest, were destined to tell a story of other exploits than his own.

Our next problem was to find the artist to do the carving, an art which is becoming very rare in Burma. In this search, Dr. Nichols asked Miss L. B. Hughes, of Moulmein, to assist him. After careful investigation, she secured the services of Maung Kin, an artistic carver, who agreed to do the work. He and his helper toiled steadily for more than a year to complete the task. In 1923, on his return to the United States, Dr. Nichols was therefore able to bring with him as part of his baggage, the finished tusks and their teakwood base.

Seven years may seem a long time for procuring only two pieces of carved ivory, but tusks with such interesting lace-work adornment, mounted on the native teak, were well worth waiting for.

The Buddhist legend carved in the ivory was selected by Maung Kin; it is a mythological story whose hero

is Weythandaya, a king with a generous heart. He was so charitable that he gave away the most precious possession in the kingdom, a white elephant. Fearing that so rash an act would endanger their prosperity, his people brought about his banishment from the country. The sufferings which Weythandaya and his family endured because of his excessive kindness, furnish the touching incidents so exquisitely depicted on the tusks. The theme of the story is distinctively characteristic of the Buddhist faith, which abounds in tales illustrating the various difficulties one must meet in striving to acquire the "ten virtues" enjoined upon men. The rare white elephant, too, is an object of peculiar veneration, as he is supposed to represent the last incarnation of the Buddha before appearing in human form. As living memorials of the god, white elephants were accorded religious honor. Their trappings were most gorgeous and often were bestudded with precious gems.

The scenes carved in the ivory may be readily recognized by following as a guide the marginal topics accompanying the text of the legend. On each tusk there are four rows, each containing four groups of figures; a fifth row toward the tip contains only three groups; and, each tip encloses a single figure: one of these is King Weythandaya; the other is his wife. With the exception of these two figures enclosed in the tips, the carvings on the two tusks represent the same scenes, similarly arranged. The silver bands encircling the lower portion, and the teakwood base, are carved to correspond with the ornamentation on the tusks.



FINAL TOUCHES IN CARVING THE TUSKS





THE LEGEND CARVED IN IVORY

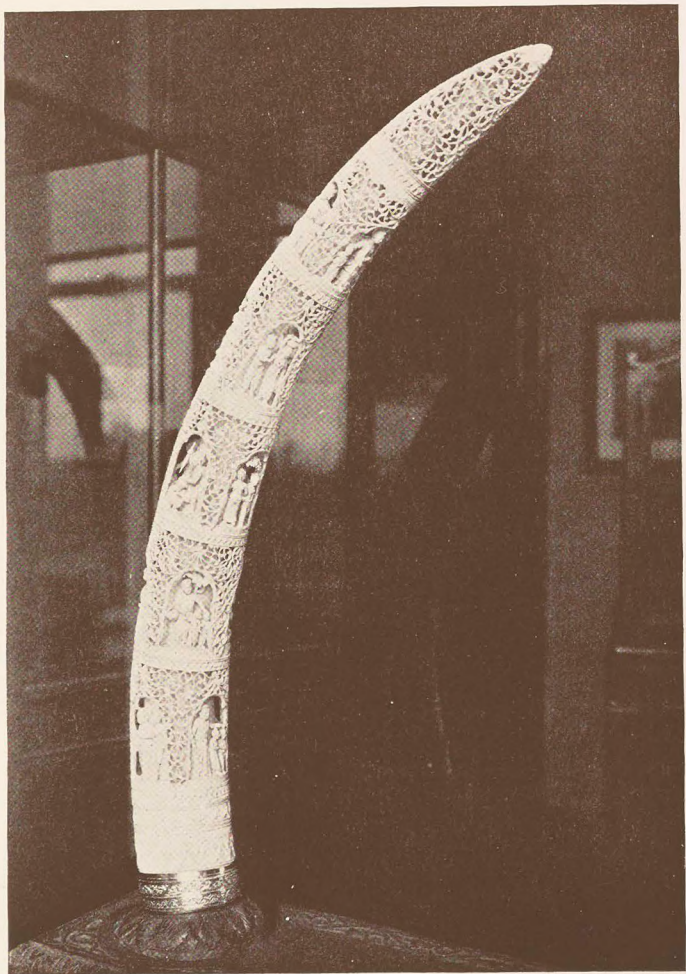
WEYTHANDAYA

IN the days when Gautama Buddha lived in India and went about the country teaching a select group of disciples, he told them a number of stories of his life in previous existences on earth. Each story represents himself as the hero, practising or illustrating in his own life one of the ten great virtues that are enjoined upon men who would obtain omniscience. As the great King Weythandaya, he exemplified the excellent virtue of Charity or Almsgiving, which he practised under grievous difficulties at first, but which brought him great merit in the end as well as a highly gratifying degree of earthly happiness. The story runs thus:

There came once to the throne of Sadotiya a young king named Theinzi, whose chief queen was a lovely young woman called Pothadi. This royal couple were chosen by the Nats (spirits) to be the parents of the Pralaung who was about to enter a new stage of his progress toward Buddhahood. Before the birth of her child Queen

Pothadi had a great desire to bestow charity, and with her husband's consent began to give away daily six hundred thousand things. The omen-readers delighted the king by declaring this to signify that the Queen would give birth to a child who would delight in charity and would never feel that he had given enough. When finally the child was born, he at once extended his hand and said, "Mother, I wish to bestow charity. Have you anything?" The Queen replied that he should give as much as he wished, and placed a bag containing a thousand pieces beside him. (Although born into the world a number of times, the Pralaung in only three of his existences spoke at the time of his birth.) On his naming-day the child was called Weythandaya.

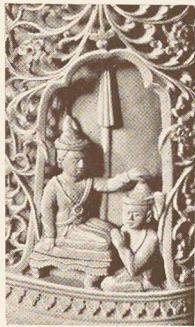
On the day of his birth there was brought to the prince a young elephant, replete with all good qualities, and perfectly white, as if its whole body were covered with silver. It was intended to be the aid and support of the Pralaung, for it brought victory in war, supremacy over all other kings, and was even able to cause rain; and so it was a very great treasure. As a child Weythandaya continued his giving of gifts; for he took off a very valuable necklace of gold one day and gave it to his nurses. The nurses in fear reported it to the King; but the King approved the gift and had another necklace made for his son, which also the boy bestowed on his nurses, and nine times during his childhood he is said to have made offerings to his nurses. When he was eight years old, he said to himself, "I have now made offerings of external objects only. I am not satisfied with these. If any man



SINGLE TUSK WITH ENCIRCLING RING
OF SILVER AT BASE



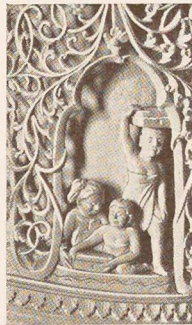
asks me for my heart or my eyes or the flesh of my body, I will give it to him. If a man wishes me to be his slave, I will serve him." And as a tribute to this noble resolution the earth quaked violently.



*Fig. 1, first row:
King Theinzi
blessing his son.*

At the age of sixteen Weythandaya was married with great pomp to his beautiful and virtuous cousin Madi, and was then crowned king of the country, receiving the throne from his father, who gave him his kingly blessing. His marriage was blessed by a son whom he called Zali, and a daughter Ganazein. As king he continued his charitable deeds and six times a month rode out on his famous white elephant, Pissaya, to visit the charity booths and give gifts to all who came.

In course of time it happened that a neighboring kingdom suffered from a severe drought and famine, and it was announced by wise men that only possession of the elephant, Pissaya, could bring rain. The king of the country accordingly sent eight Brahmans to beg the elephant from King Weythandaya. When they arrived at his capital, they found him riding out on the elephant to visit the charity zayats, and at length these dirty, repulsive-looking Brahmans found opportunity to tell him of the plight



*Fig. 2, first row:
Servants bearing
boxes of gifts.*

of their country and to beg that he would give them the elephant as an offering. This Weythandaya promptly consented to do, and after examining the animal carefully to see that all of its invaluable ornaments and trappings were in perfect order, he gladly gave it into their hands along with five hundred families to care for it. This remarkable gift was commended by a second earthquake.

The elephant was at once driven away by the Brahmans amidst the reproaches of the populace, who presently rushed to the palace of King Theinzi to protest against the rash act of his son; for the white elephant was the choicest and most precious thing in this or any kingdom, and was the cause of the prosperity of the land. When they began to threaten his life and his son's, King Theinzi pleaded for Weythandaya and finally was able to appease them by consenting to banish his son from the capital to the Wingaba Hills; and so obtained one night's respite for him.

Meanwhile King Weythandaya, rejoicing over his great gift, was sitting in his palace when a minister sent by King Theinzi brought the news of the people's demand. Weythandaya was surprised, but entirely satisfied that he had done right, and accepted the sentence willingly. He would rather be killed than cease his gifts of charity. But he obtained from the people one day of grace, in order that he might make the great offering of seven hundred things to beggars. He then went to his wife, Queen Madi, to tell her of his banishment and to advise her what to do after he had gone away. Queen

Madi was filled with grief at his suggestion of leaving her behind, and insisted upon being allowed to accom-



pany him, saying, "Great King, you whom I love more than my life, why do you utter such words? One who loves his wife should tell her of all his affairs and ask her to follow him. Only when she refuses should he go alone. Even if you are banished, I shall follow you. As a female elephant follows her mate through valleys and over mountains, so shall I follow you, with my two children, and serve you for your happiness." Accordingly, Weythandaya consented to her going, for he could not withstand her earnest pleading.

On the following day he made the great offering of seven hundred things: seven hundred elephants with their drivers; seven hundred lovely maidens; seven hundred of the finest horses with their riders; seven hundred beautiful chariots with charioteers in full armor; besides milch-cows, menservants, maidservants, clothing, and every kind of food and drink, seven hundred of each. The beggars who came to receive these gifts, lamented the departure of their generous benefactor, but the people of the city looked on with ill-concealed disgust at this exhibition of his charity. However, the Nats (spirits) approved, for "the earth turned round like a potter's wheel, causing a noise loud and fearful enough to make one's flesh creep." This was the third earthquake.

*Fig. 3, first row:
Weythandaya and
his sorrowful wife.*

The young King and Queen bade a tender farewell to the King's parents, King Theinzi and Queen Pothadi, who tried to dissuade Madi from following her husband into the dismal forest and to hardships to which she was not accustomed; but she could not be turned aside. Then King Theinzi pleaded with her to leave her children in his care, but she would not consent; and he was obliged to

*Fig. 4, first row:
King Theinzi and
his grandchildren.*



*Fig. 1, second row:
The Brahman
driving away the
white elephant.*

part from them in sorrow. Then King Weythandaya and Queen Madi, with their children, drove away in a chariot toward the Wingaba Hill.

Meanwhile the Brahman was driving the famous white elephant away to the country of Kalinga. As he



*Fig. 2, second row:
King Weythandaya
and his children
going into exile.*



went out through the city, Weythandaya made offerings eighteen times to the beggars along the way; and the earth quaked a fourth time. After a while he was met by four Brahmins who begged for his four horses, and another who asked for the chariot. The King cheerfully gave them all, and he and his family went on their way afoot. The first



DETAIL OF LOWER SECTION OF TUSK



day they traveled four hundred and five miles, by the aid of the Nats, who pitied them.



A day or two later, upon reaching the Wingaba Hill the royal family found two cells prepared for them by the Nats. Weythandaya took one of them for his use and Queen Madi with her children occupied the other: and so they began to live the lives of ascetics. The queen went out daily into the forest and brought back fruits and roots

for their food, while the children remained in their father's care. In this way for seven months the little family lived happily in the Himawunta forest.



Now an old beggar, a Brahman, had an unhappy young wife, for whom he wished to procure two servants; and hearing of the charitable deeds of King Weythandaya, he decided to go to him and ask for them. When he found that the King had been banished from his capital, he followed him to the Wingaba Hill to beg for the two royal children. He came to the King, who was wearing



*Fig. 3, second row:
Queen Madi and
her children in the
forest.*

*Fig. 4, second row:
The Brahman
beggar and
Weythandaya.*

*Fig. 1, third row:
The two children
dancing in the
forest.*

*Fig. 2, third row:
Weythandaya
pouring out the
water of the
offering.*



*Fig. 3, third row:
The Brahman
beating the
royal children.*



the habit of a rahan, and asked that he might be given these children. Meanwhile the two children were danc-

ing and playing in the forest. The father was delighted to make the desired gift, for he knew that in his "ship of virtuous deeds" he would cross the ocean of future existence and reach "Neikban," where there is no rebirth. The children, frightened by the terrible old beggar, ran and hid, but when their father pleaded with them to aid him in this virtuous deed, they consented to follow the

Brahman. So the King brought out a golden goblet of water and called the Brahman to him. As, with a prayer that this good deed might bring him omniscience, he poured out the water, the earth quaked frightfully, the ocean, too, was much disturbed, and a heavy rain fell although it was not the season for rain—a tribute to his great virtue. This was the fifth earthquake. The ugly Brahman, refusing to await the mother's return, bound the children with a creeper which he bit off with his teeth in the jungle near by, and beat them with a stick in the very presence of their father; but the heart of King Weythandaya did not alter, though he was distressed at his children's sufferings. Zali, the son, begged that his father

would let him alone go with the Brahman, and would keep little Ganazein, who was tender and delicate; but the beggar drove them away, beating them cruelly with his club. The King went into his cell and wept bitterly for his children, for he loved them dearly; and at one moment he determined to rush after the Brahman and slay him with his sword. But he reasoned with himself and concluded that it was unworthy to repent of giving away his children.

Meanwhile Queen Madi, filled with strange foreboding, tried to return earlier than usual to the cell with her basket of food, but her way was barred by three Nats (spirits) who took the forms of a lion, a tiger and a leopard; and she was obliged to stay away



in the forest until the Brahman had gone a considerable distance with her children. When she reached the cell, the moon had risen, and she could not find the children. The King refused to speak to her or to answer her questions, and she spent the night searching the forest and lamenting, until at daybreak she fell swooning at her husband's feet. He trembled violently, thinking that she was dead, and at once set about to restore her. As soon as she became conscious, her first question was for her children.



*Fig. 4, third row:
King Weythandaya
about to kill the
beggar.*

*Fig. 1, fourth row:
Queen Madi
delayed by a Nat
in the form of
a beast.*

When her husband explained that he had given them away in order to obtain merit, but that he had refrained

from telling her for fear of breaking her heart, Queen Madi joyfully assured him that he had done only right in giving away the children, and expressed the hope that he might be able to make more such offerings.

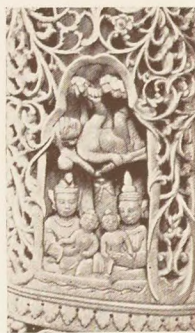
As the wretched old Brahman, with Zali and Ganazein, proceeded on his journey, the Nats guarded the children. The old man, fearing wild



*Fig. 2, fourth row:
The Brahman
and the royal
children.*

beasts, slept at night in the fork of a tree, while he left the children tied in the bushes. But while he was asleep, two Nats, one in the form of King Weythandaya and the other in the form of Queen Madi, came to them and after undoing the creepers that bound them, massaged their limbs, bathed and dressed them, gave them food and drink of the Nats, and watched over them as they slept.

Now the chief of the Nats, realizing that King Weythandaya, having given away his children, would also give his wife to the first person who asked for her, decided to go himself in the guise of a Brahman and ask for Madi. Early in the morning he appeared before the King and Queen and asked, in the customary manner of greeting, "O King, how is it with



*Fig. 3, fourth row:
The Nats caring
for the children
in the forest.*



DETAIL OF UPPER SECTION OF TUSK



you? Are you free from sickness? Have you enough fruits and roots? Are they easily obtained? Are flies, mosquitoes, scorpions and fleas scarce? Is this forest, which is full of wild beasts, free from dangers? Is it peaceful?" The King, after answering each question politely, bade him welcome and asked why he had come.



The Brahman (Nat) replied that he had come to ask for Queen Madi as a gift. Gladly Weythandaya gave her to him, not stopping to consider how he should be able to live without her in the forest; and with a prayer that this good deed might bring him omniscience, he poured out a goblet of water, as the custom was. Immediately there was another fearful earthquake. This was the sixth one.

*Fig. 4, fourth row:
Queen Madi
given by Wey-
thandaya to the
beggar.*

The Queen, on being given away, did not weep, but approved her husband's act, hoping that he might thus obtain the reward that he desired. Then the great Nat, revealing himself to them, restored Madi to her husband and commended Weythandaya's excellent charity.

The old, repulsive Brahman beggar, meantime, was on his way toward Sadotiya, King Theinzi's capital, because the Nats were directing him there, although he was trying to return to his home. As he and the royal



*Fig. 1, fifth row:
The Brahman
and the royal
children.*

at the door of his cell, he realized that his exile was at an end. His first question was for his beloved children

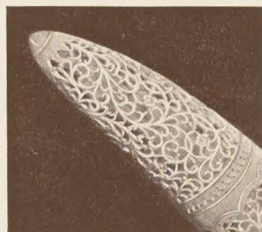


and his joy at the news of their safety was great. Presently Zali and Gana-zein appeared and hastened to their mother, who was quite overcome by emotion. Indeed, the whole royal group was completely prostrated by the joyous excitement of the hour, and a great earthquake followed. They were presently revived by a gentle rain sent by the Nats, that fell upon the royal persons only.

*Fig. 3, fifth row:
Queen Madi
reunited to her
children.*

The return to Sadoliya was accomplished with great pomp and rejoicing, in a journey of easy stages, and the people of the city and villages welcomed King Weythandaya gladly. His first thought after his arrival was of the mendicants who would come on the morrow, and he wondered what he could give them. When the chief Nat realized that the King was again thinking about alms-giving, he caused a shower of precious stones to fall during the night in the palace to the depth of a man's waist, and knee-deep in the city. The people were allowed to keep what fell inside of their own enclosure; but all that fell on the highways, on the city wall, and in the palace enclosure belonged to the king. Weythandaya was once more set upon his father's throne, and continued to give offerings every day as long as he lived, and when he died, he passed to the Tot-titha nat country, the abode of those who do good deeds.

THE FIGURES IN THE TIPS



At the top of each graceful curve within the ivory tip,
is enclosed a figure in royal attire, daintily carved
with great perfection. One figure represents
King Weythandaya, and the other,
Queen Madi, triumphant at last
after all their sorrows.



THE CARVED IVORY TUSKS MOUNTED
ON BASE OF TEAKWOOD













